

Insights Daily Current Affairs + PIB: 27 August 2019

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Comprehensive coverage of PIB, the Hindu and relevant articles from various other sources:

GS Paper 1:

Topics Covered:

1. Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc., geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

Why a crater on the moon is named 'Mitra'?

What to study?

For Prelims: Naming of lunar craters.

For mains: how are they formed?

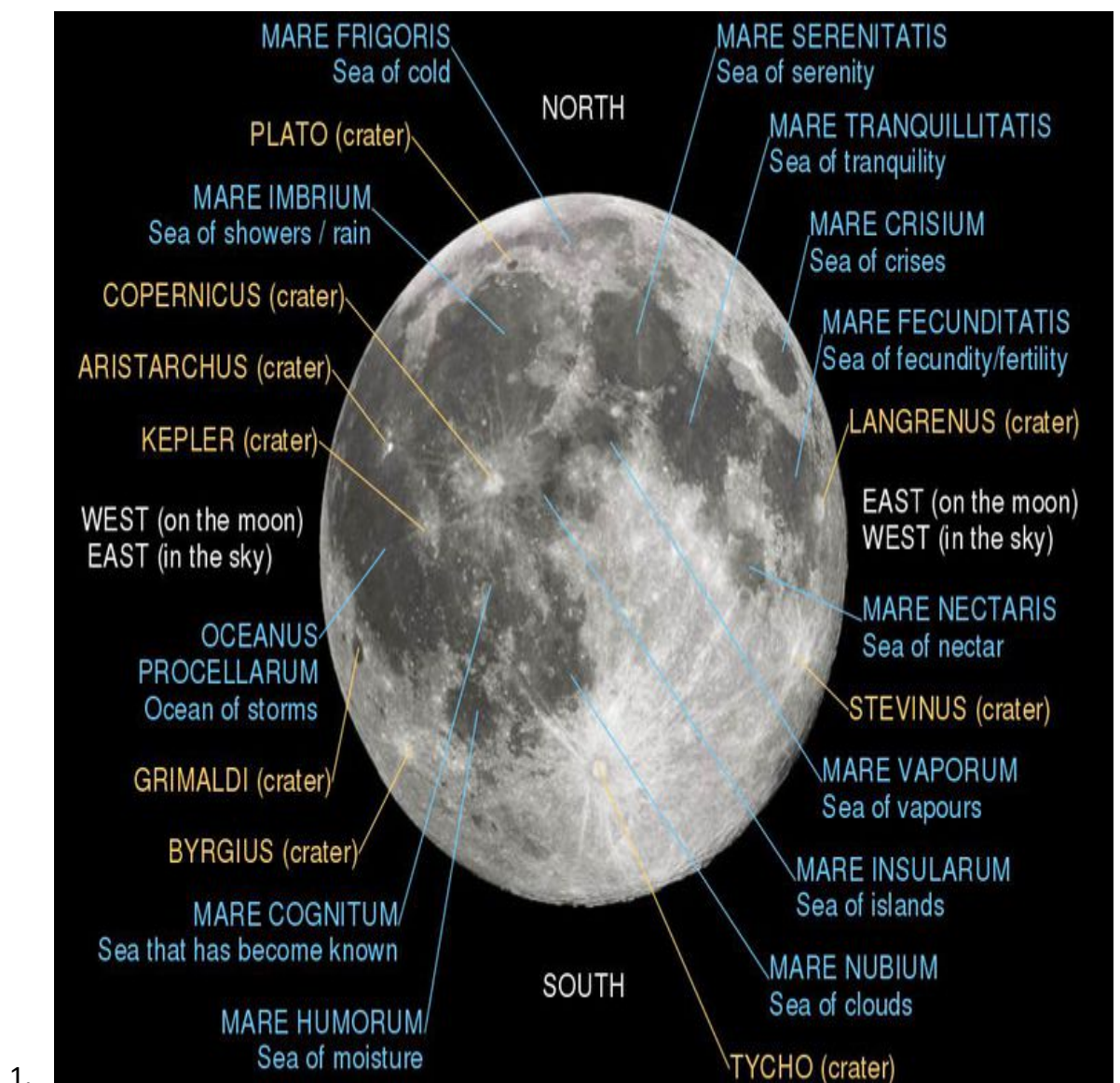
Context: On 23 August, Chandrayaan-2 captured images of various craters on the moon while passing over its north polar region. Of the various craters, it spotted one called '**Mitra**'.

Why is it named so?

It is an impact based crater named after noted Indian physicist Sisir Kumar Mitra.

The name was given by **Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature (WGPSN)**, part of International Astronomical Union (IAU), after a successful review in 1970, seven years after the death of Mitra.

How are craters on moon named?



Typically, members of an appropriate IAU task group suggest

names when the first images of the surface of a planet or satellite is obtained but as higher resolution images become available, a specific name is recommended.

2. The suggested names are reviewed by the task force which submits it to the Working Group to take a final call based on votes.

About Sisir Kumar Mitra:

1. Mitra led the research in ionosphere–the upper region of the atmosphere–and radiophysics.
2. He was **the first to introduce the teaching of radio communication in India.**
3. His book, '**Upper Atmosphere**' published in 1947 is still considered the Bible for research workers in the field of ionosphere.
4. In 1950s, he advocated **space research and high altitude rocket research programmes** which had been successfully conducted by US and USSR.
5. Soon after his death in 1963, India set up rocket and launching stations near the geomagnetic equatorial line and a large number of rockets and satellites were fired, bringing invaluable information of the upper atmosphere and beyond.

How are Lunar craters formed?

1. Moon craters are bowl-shaped landforms created by two processes: **volcanism and cratering**. There are hundreds of thousands of moon craters ranging from less than a mile across to giant basins called mare, which were once thought to be seas.
2. **The largest crater on the Moon is called South Pole-Aitkin Basin.** It's about 1,600 miles across (2,500 kilometers). It's also among the oldest of the Moon's impact basins and formed just a few hundred million years or so after the Moon itself was formed.
3. Because of the **Moon's lack of water, atmosphere, and tectonic plates**, there is little erosion, and craters are found that exceed two billion years in age.

For Overview Chandrayaan- 2, refer:

<https://www.insightsonindia.com/2019/08/21/chandrayaan-2-3/>.

Sources: the Hindu.

GS Paper 2:

Topics covered:

1. Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

Advisory Board for Banking Frauds (ABBF)

Context: The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has constituted an 'Advisory Board for Banking Frauds (ABBF)' to examine bank fraud of over ₹50 crore and recommend action.

Headquartered in Delhi, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will provide required secretarial services, logistic and analytical support along with the necessary funding to the board.

Composition:

- Besides the chairman, the Board consists of three other members.

- The tenure of the Chairman and members would be for a period of two years from 21st August, 2019.

Functions:

1. The board's jurisdiction would be confined to those cases involving the level of officers of General Manager and above in the Public Sector Banks in respect of an allegation of fraud in a borrowal account.
2. It would function as the first level of examination of all large fraud cases before recommendations or references are made to the investigative agencies by the respective public sector banks (PSBs).
3. Lenders would refer all large fraud cases above ₹50 crore to the board and on receipt of its recommendation or advice, the bank concerned would take further action in such matter.
4. The Central Bureau of Investigation may also refer any case or matter to the board where it has any issue or difficulty or in technical matters with the PSB concerned.
5. It would also periodically carry out frauds analysis in the financial system and give inputs for policy formulation related to the fraud to the RBI.

Sources: the Hindu.

[Time to strike the gavel:](#)

Context: on April 28, 1976, the Supreme Court of India Delivered a judgment in the **Additional District Magistrate vs. S.S. Shukla Etc.** case that allowed the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus during Emergency.

1. Today, there is no Emergency, yet **the constitutional and basic rights of scores have been suspended in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K)**. Worse, the Supreme Court has virtually taken away their constitutional remedy to enforce those rights.
2. Regrettably, the court has treated habeas corpus petitions in a most casual manner by justifying negation of the rule of law.

What's the concern now in J&K case?

Article 21 is about life and liberty, and all that the Supreme Court has done is to defer these crucial matters without taking the government to task.

- In the first instance, the state failed “to ensure normalcy” from the day it abrogated Article 370; it has now tried to buy more time from the top court to do so.
- The “situation is such that nobody knows what exactly is happening there”, but that is precisely why it is the duty to court to ascertain true facts. **It cannot shy away from doing justice in the name of “security” and “law and order”.**

Conclusion:

It is not suggested here that the security of the nation can be compromised; nor can one argue that law and order ought not to be controlled. But preservation of both is the duty of the state. If it intends to do so by taking away fundamental and basic human rights then one can infer that the state has failed in its duty.

The judiciary needs to dispel the perception that it is no longer the pillar created to protect constitutional and legal rights. **In any failure, its stature and status as the “bulwark of the rule of law and the democracy” will be compromised.**

Sources: the Hindu.

GS Paper 2:

Topics covered:

1. Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
2. Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability.

Open Acreage Licensing Policy

What to study?

For Prelims: OALP, HELP.

For Mains: Need for HELP and its significance.

Context: Govt offers seven oil and natural gas blocks for bidding under OALP-IV.

What is Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP)?

The OALP, a critical **part of the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy**, provides uniform licences for exploration and production of all

forms of hydrocarbons, enabling contractors to explore conventional as well as unconventional oil and gas resources.

Fields are offered under a **revenue-sharing model** and throw up marketing and pricing freedom for crude oil and natural gas produced.

- Under the OALP, once an explorer selects areas after evaluating the National Data Repository (NDR) and submits the EoI, it is to be put up for competitive bidding and the entity offering the maximum share of oil and gas to the government is awarded the block.
- NDR has been created to provide explorers' data on the country's repositories, allowing them to choose fields according to their capabilities. Data received through the National Seismic Programme, an in-depth study of 26 sedimentary basins, are continuously being added to the NDR.

Background:

The Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) replacing the erstwhile New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) was approved in March 2016 and the Open Acreage Licensing Programme (OALP) along with the National Data Repository (NDR) were launched in June 2017 as the key drivers to accelerate the Exploration and Production (E&P) activities in India.

The main features of HELP are Revenue Sharing Contract, single Licence for exploration and production of conventional as well as unconventional Hydrocarbon resources, marketing & pricing freedom, etc.

Sources: pib.

[GS Paper 2:](#)

Topics Covered:

1. Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Scope for third party mediation in Kashmir

What to study?

For Prelims: Various bilateral agreements between India and Pakistan.

For mains: Mediation in Kashmir issue- do we need it? India's opposition and what is the way out?

Context: PM rejects scope for third party mediation in Kashmir.

- Modi made these remarks while interacting with the media alongside U.S. President Donald Trump, had said that he will discuss **the Kashmir issue with him on the sidelines of the G7 summit in the French town of Biarritz.**
- Trump in the recent past has offered mediation between India and Pakistan on the Kashmir issue.

Background:

India has categorically told the international community that **the scrapping of Article 370 was an internal matter and also advised Pakistan to accept the reality.**

What is mediation?

Both in international law and diplomacy, mediation often denotes a 'friendly interference' of a neutral state in the controversies of other nations, with the objective of using its influence to 'adjust their difficulties'.

Previous instances of mediation:

The US offer to mediate in the Kashmir dispute is not new. There have been precedents when India and Pakistan have allowed a third-party to help resolve their issues.

1. **Indus Water treaty:** Both nations were able to reach agreements through third party mediators in case of the Indus Waters Treaty and the negotiations on the Rann of Kutch dispute.
2. **Rann of Kutch Accord** (mediated by British Prime Minister Harold Wilson) persuaded the combatants to end hostilities and establish a tribunal to resolve the dispute.
3. **During the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war**, the then USSR led mediation efforts paved the way for India and Pakistan to withdraw forces from each other's territories while agreeing to discuss all future matters. This was followed by signing of the **Tashkent Declaration** in Uzbekistan.

Why India's reluctance to third-party intervention on the issue is justified?

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since 1947, two of which have centred on Kashmir.

- Given the heightened state of nationalism across the border, critics might argue that **Kashmir cannot be compared to the Indus Water Treaty arbitration or the Rann of Kutch accord or the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war mediation.**

- India, for instance, argues that **mediation has no chance of working better than bilateral agreements, like the Simla Agreement of 1972** that both sides agreed to respect.
- From India's stand point **Kashmir remains an internal problem.**
- Apprehension of the country's policy works mainly stems from the fact that **in the event of a third-party mediation (by the US for instance), America could use its might as the world's superpower to impose a solution on Kashmir that might go contrary to India's stated position.**
- Such concerns are not entirely without basis. **The UN resolutions on Kashmir have historically been a diplomatic imbroglio for India,** which emphasises bilateralism on the issue.
- Clearly New Delhi does not want to set a foreign policy precedent if it allows some kind of international facilitation on Kashmir.

What needs to be done now?

1. Kashmir dispute has dragged on for nearly seven decades now. Wars have been fought over it and countless lives lost across both sides of the India-Pakistan border.
2. Both countries are nuclear armed and there is a danger — as witnessed during the recent Balakot strikes — of a skirmish turning into a big flashpoint over Kashmir.
3. It is time for India and Pakistan to resolve the conflict and if they somehow find the mutual distrust too big to gulf, may be take help from a neutral player.

Conclusion:

Principles of state sovereignty and non-interference dictate that mediation needs not be imposing. It can be beneficial, non-coercive and compatible with the structures of international system. We already have a historical precedent to it.

Sources: the Hindu.

GS Paper 2:

Topics covered:

1. Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

G7 bloc

What to study?

For Prelims: Composition and objectives of G7 countries.

For mains: G7- criticisms and the need for reforms.

Context: The 45th Annual G7 Summit is being held in the French town of Biarritz.

What is G7 Summit?

- G7 Summit is an event conducted annually where world leaders from seven powerful economies of the world come together to discuss burning issues happening around the globe.

- They, by mutual understanding, also form policies or figure out remedies for the concerned issue.

The 2019 G7 Summit, presided over by France, will focus on fighting inequality. France has identified the following five objectives for the Summit:

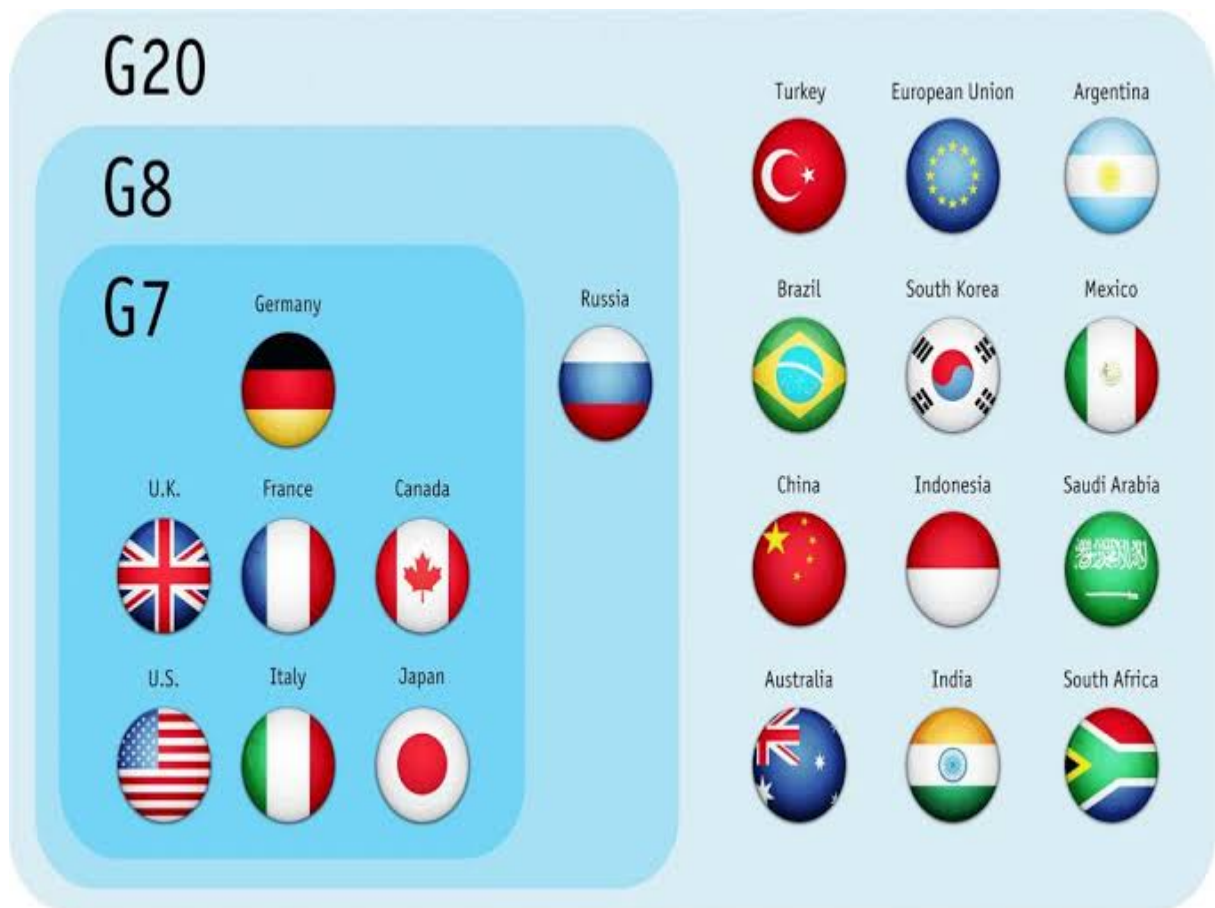
1. fighting inequality of opportunity, promoting in particular gender equality, access to education and high quality health services;
2. reducing environmental inequality;
3. strengthening the social dimension of globalization;
4. taking action for peace against security threats and terrorism; and
5. tapping into the opportunities created by digital technology and artificial intelligence (AI).

What is G7?

The G7, originally G8, was set up in 1975 as an informal forum bringing together the leaders of the world's leading industrial nations.

The summit gathers leaders from the European Union (EU) and the following countries:

1. Canada
2. France
3. Germany
4. Italy
5. Japan
6. the United Kingdom
7. the United States



Significance:

G7 is capable of setting the global agenda because decisions taken by these major economic powers have a real impact. Thus, **decisions taken at the G7 are not legally binding, but exert strong political influence.**

What's on this year's agenda?

On the agenda for this year's summit will be the ongoing trade war between the United States and China, the European-backed nuclear deal with Iran currently opposed by President Trump, and the unrest that continues to unfold in Hong Kong.

What criticisms have been made of the G7?

1. G7 gatherings tend to attract thousands of protesters, and it is protested by thousands every year.
2. Many protesters claim the G7 – which has no representative from any African, Russian or Middle Eastern nation – is completely outdated.
3. Protest groups also use the worldwide platform as a stage to lobby and campaign on issues that are important to them.
4. G7 leaders are creating a wide gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' both in their countries as well as across the globe, according to a new report published by non-profit Oxfam International. As a result, **they are making the fight against alleviating poverty more difficult, claimed the report.**

Policies and actions that has created unequal economies across the globe. They are:

1. Extreme wealth accumulation by a few.
2. Failure of governments to implement progressive tax systems.
3. Reducing funding to public services like education, healthcare and social protection as well as foreign aid.
4. Under-taxing corporations and wealth.
5. Not doing enough to curb emissions.
6. Promoting sexism.

Need of the hour:

1. Work towards implementing tax models for the rich individuals and corporations to pay their fair share of tax.
2. Consider how new and existing wealth taxes could be used as a tool to fight poverty and inequality.
3. Invest in healthcare and education and provide aid to developing countries.
4. Work towards limiting greenhouse gas emissions down to zero well before mid-century.

Sources: the hindu.

[Talking trade with the EU:](#)

Context: As the economy begins to suffer from the U.S.-China trade war, it is imperative for India to pursue **a free trade agreement (FTA) with the European Union (EU)**.

Why it is important for India to hasten talks with the EU on a free trade agreement?

1. India risks being left behind amidst a collapsing global trade architecture, rising protectionism and a new emphasis on bilateral FTAs.
2. India is the only major power lacking an FTA with any of its top trade partners, including the EU, the U.S., China and Gulf economies. This situation is not tenable as most trade is now driven either by FTAs or global value chains. The EU's revived focus on FTAs could only exacerbate this risk for India.
3. Stuck in a 'grey zone', without preferential FTA tariffs or GSP+ status, India will struggle to keep exports competitive for Europe, its largest trade partner where 20% of its exports land up.
4. The collapse of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and concerns about excessive economic reliance on China have propelled the EU to become a little more pragmatic, which New Delhi should leverage before it's too late.
5. The EU also offers India a unique regulatory model that balances growth, privacy and standards. India's governance framework

shares the European norms of democratic transparency and multi-stakeholder participation on a variety of new technological domains, from regulating artificial intelligence to 5G networks.

6. New Delhi must see this as a strategic premium that is not accounted for in a strict cost-benefit economic analysis.

What needs to be done?

1. Beyond mere economic cost-benefit analysis, India must also approach an EU FTA from a geo-strategic perspective. New Delhi must realise the long-term strategic benefits of a trade deal with Europe.
2. When New Delhi speaks of Europe as a strategic partner to uphold a multipolar order, it must go beyond security and begin with the business of trade and technology.

Sources: the Hindu.

GS Paper 2 and 3:

Topics covered:

1. Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
2. Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.
3. Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

RBI Panel on Economic Capital Framework

What to study?

For Prelims: Meaning of Economic Capital Framework, arrangements for sharing of surplus between RBI and the government.

For Mains: Issues over RBI autonomy, need for transfer of surplus and the need for review of existing arrangements.

Context: Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has approved the transfer of record Rs 1.76 lakh crore dividend and surplus reserves to the government.

- The excess reserve transfer is in line with the recommendation of former RBI governor **Bimal Jalan-led panel constituted to decide size of capital reserves** that the central bank should hold.

Boost to finances

At a board meeting on Monday, the RBI decided to hand over its entire 2018-19 surplus of ₹1.23 lakh cr. to the govt

In ₹ crore	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Income	64,617	79,256	80,870	61,818	78,281
Expenditure	11,934	13,356	14,990	31,155	28,277
Net surplus	52,683	65,900	65,880	30,663	50,004
Surplus given to centre	52,679	65,896	65,876	30,659	50,000
% of RBI's net profit	99.99	99.99	99.99	99.99	99.99

Background:

RBI had constituted a panel on economic capital framework. It was headed by Ex-RBI governor Bimal Jalan.

The expert panel on RBI's economic capital framework was formed to address the issue of RBI reserves—one of the sticking points between the central bank and the government.

What's the issue?

The government has been insisting that the central bank hand over its surplus reserves amid a shortfall in revenue collections. Access to the funds will allow the government to meet deficit targets, infuse capital into weak banks to boost lending and fund welfare programmes.

What is economic capital framework?

Economic capital framework refers to the risk capital required by the central bank while taking into account different risks. The economic capital framework reflects the capital that an institution requires or needs to hold as a counter against unforeseen risks or events or losses in the future.

Why it needs a fix?

1. Existing economic capital framework which governs the RBI's capital requirements and terms for the transfer of its surplus to the government is based on a conservative assessment of risk by the central bank and that a review of the framework would result in excess capital being freed, which the RBI can then share with the government.

2. The government believes that RBI is sitting on much higher reserves than it actually needs to tide over financial emergencies that India may face.
3. Some central banks around the world (like US and UK) keep 13% to 14% of their assets as a reserve compared to RBI's 27% and some (like Russia) more than that.
4. Economists in the past have argued for RBI releasing 'extra' capital that can be put to productive use by the government. The Malegam Committee estimated the excess (in 2013) at Rs 1.49 lakh crore.

What is the nature of the arrangement between the government and RBI on the transfer of surplus or profits?

Although RBI was promoted as a private shareholders' bank in 1935 with a paid up capital of Rs 5 crore, the government nationalised RBI in January 1949, making the sovereign its "owner". What the central bank does, therefore, is transfer the "surplus" — that is, the excess of income over expenditure — to the government, in accordance with **Section 47** (Allocation of Surplus Profits) of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.

Does the RBI pay tax on these earnings or profits?

No. Its statute provides exemption from paying income-tax or any other tax, including wealth tax.

Why RBI needs excess reserves?

1. The RBI needs adequate capital reserves for monetary policy operations, currency fluctuations, possible fall in value of bonds, sterilisation costs related to open-market operations, credit risks arising from the lender of last resort function and other risks from unexpected increase in its expenditure.

2. The RBI has maintained the view that it needs to have a stronger balance sheet to deal with a possible crisis and external shocks.

Sources: the Hindu.

Giving wings to better air connectivity:

Context: The cooperation of States is seen as a major factor in the growth of the civil aviation sector.

Why states have been reluctant so far?

Civil aviation is a **Central subject**.

Very few States in India have active **civil aviation departments**. This is also due to the reason that States have had a passive role, invariably, having had to look up to the Central government for the development of airports and enhancing air connectivity.

Changing times:

In the last four years, the situation has changed considerably.

- The **Regional Connectivity Scheme, UdeDeshkaAamNaagrik (UDAN)**, has become a game changer as this flagship programme has a

built-in mechanism to develop stakes of State governments in the growth of the sector.

- **Thirty States and Union Territories have already signed memoranda of understanding with the Central government.** The policies of States and Centre are now being interlinked to make flying accessible and affordable.

Issues and challenges present:

States have very high rates of value-added tax (VAT) on ATF — sometimes as high as 25% — which has dampened the growth trajectory of civil aviation. For any airline in India, the cost of **Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF)** forms about 40% of the total operational cost.

Acquisition of land: Land involves huge capital and is a scarce resource.

Key policy interventions necessary to jump-start the aviation market:

Relief on ATF: The airline industry is capital-intensive and works on very thin profit margins. Therefore, relief on ATF is a major incentive for airlines to augment their operations.

For States, it would be a notional revenue loss which can be offset by **enhanced economic activities as a result of increased air connectivity to the region.**

Development and management of airports: There are many regional airports which can be developed by States on their own or in collaboration with the Airports Authority of India (AAI).

PPP model: There have been different models of public-private-partnership which can be leveraged to develop infrastructures.

Create 'no-frill airports': Innovative models can be explored to create viable 'no-frill airports'. These functional airports can open up regions and change the way people travel.

States and the Central government can play a crucial role in supporting airlines to develop air services in the remote regions.

Considering the infrastructural constraints and difficult terrain, **small aircraft operators need to be encouraged.**

Areas which cannot be connected meaningfully by road or rail have to be linked by air.

States may converge their relevant schemes relating to tourism, health, and insurance for supporting air connectivity to supplement the objectives of regional connectivity.

For this States need to create a conducive business environment to facilitate the strong aspirations of a burgeoning Indian middle class to fly at least once a year.

Conclusion:

Currently the penetration of the aviation market in India stands at 7%. There is potential to be among the global top three nations in terms of domestic and international passenger traffic.

Developing airports, incentivising airlines and pooling resources of both the Union and State governments can accelerate the harmonised growth of the Indian civil aviation sector which would be equitable and inclusive.

Sources: the Hindu.

GS Paper 3:

Topics covered:

1. Conservation related issues.

DRAFT NATIONAL RESOURCE EFFICIENCY POLICY

What to study?

For Prelims: Key features of the policy.

For Mains: Resource efficiency- need, significance, challenges and means to achieve it, NITI Aayog's strategy on resource efficiency.

Context: Acknowledging the progress that has been made to implement **Draft National Resource Efficiency Policy (NREP)**, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change have extended the timeline to invite comments on it by another month.

Key features of the policy:

1. It seeks to set up a **National Resource Efficiency Authority (NREA)** with a core working group housed in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and a members group with representations from different ministries, state/union territory, and other stakeholders.

2. The authority would be supported by an **Inter-Ministerial National Resource Efficiency Board** to guide on the aspects critical to its implementation.
3. It also plans to **offer tax benefits** on recycled materials, green loans to small and medium Enterprises (SMEs) and soft loans to construct waste disposal facilities, apart from setting up **Material Recovery Facilities (MRF)**.
4. Idea of the national policy is to drive the country towards **circular economy** through efficient use of available material resources, based on principle of 6R and 'green public procurement'.
5. **The 6R stands for reduce, reuse, recycle, redesign, re-manufacture and refurbish** while the very premise of 'green public procurement' is to procure products with lower environmental footprints such as secondary raw materials and locally sourced materials.
6. It also pitches for moving towards '**zero landfill**' approach in the country, hinting at possibility of imposing 'landfill taxes' and 'high tipping fees' for bulk generators of waste so that they can move towards optimal use of materials and better waste management.

What is Resource Efficiency?

Resource efficiency very simply put is **making more with fewer materials**. In practice, through a life-cycle approach, it leads to minimizing impact on environment & the associated societal burdens, transforming 'waste' into 'resources' fostering circular economy, and strengthening resource security.

Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy are important goals and central principles for achieving sustainable development. Sustainability is a global priority and SDGs commitment and 11th Five year plan also clearly enunciate importance of Resource efficiency (RE).

Why ensure resource efficiency?

India's large population, rapid urbanization and expanding industrial production have led to **exploitation of available limited natural resources with concerns regarding resource depletion and future availability becoming more pronounced.**

Therefore, **Enhancing resource efficiency (RE) and promoting the use of secondary raw materials (SRM) is a pertinent strategy to address these challenges and reduce dependence on primary resource.**

Challenges before India:

1. According to data available, **India's resource extraction of 1580 tonnes/acre is much higher than the world average of 450 tonnes/acre, while material productivity remains low.**
2. **Water is fast becoming scarce while deteriorating air quality** has emerged as a major threat to human life.
3. There has been massive **soil degradation**, with 147 million hectares (Mha) of a total of 329 Mha land area hit.
4. **Import dependency is nearly 100% for the majority of the 'most critical' materials** -cobalt, copper and lithium that find extensive application in high-end technology industry.
5. Over **80% of crude oil that is processed in the economy is imported**, alongwith 85% of its coking coal demand. Extraction of non-metallic minerals is crippled with challenges.
6. To add to the problems, the **country's recycling rate is just about 20-25% compared with 70% in developing countries in Europe.** The situation will only aggravate as India is likely to double its material consumption by 2030.

Strategy on Resource Efficiency:

1. **NITI Aayog in collaboration with the European Union** delegation to India have released the **Strategy on Resource Efficiency.** The strategy aims to promote resource efficiency in India.

2. This strategy is **the first policy document to emphasize resource productivity in the country**. The Strategy emphasizes on **Sustainable Public Procurement (SSP)** as an action agenda which will be the market transformation tool to transform to a resource efficient economy.
3. It is developed with the recommendations from the **Indian Resource Efficiency Programme (IREP)**, launched by the Indian Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and Indian Resource Panel (InRP) in April 2017.

Sources: pib.

Editorials summary:

Earth's burning lungs: On Amazon's rainforest fire:

Context: The **Amazon rainforest**, the largest of its kind in the world, is ablaze, with over 9,500 distinct fires burning through its main basin since August 15.

Is it new? No. Fires are common in Amazon forests.

- But, this year **the crisis has been aggravated mainly by loggers and farmers seeking**, as they do during the summer months, to clear vast tracts for agricultural or industrial use.

How bad is the situation?

- There has been an increase of at least 80% in the number of recorded fires compared to the same period in 2018.
- The **number and intensity of the fires are closely linked to the rate of deforestation**. Some reports estimate that in July 2019, the Amazon shrunk by 1,345 sq km, up 39% from the same month last year, and a historical record.

And how will that affect climate change?

1. **Forests contain carbon, stored in the trees and vegetation** — to the tune of 459 tonnes per hectare in the Amazon.
2. **When a tree is cut, the carbon inside will reenter the atmosphere years later, at the end of its use cycle when it decomposes**. When vegetation is burned, as is happening now, the carbon enters the atmosphere immediately.
3. In both cases, **the carbon will be released**. It just takes some simple math to realize that the total for the past few months has already reached hundreds of millions of tonnes of carbon.

Significance of the Amazon:

The entire world needs the Amazon, the world's largest rainforest, to survive and fight global warming.

Called the **"lungs of the planet"** for its role in sucking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and adding fresh oxygen to it, this green cover which spreads over several South American countries — 60% of it in Brazil — is crucial for sustaining the human civilisation.

Why Brazil is to blamed for all these?

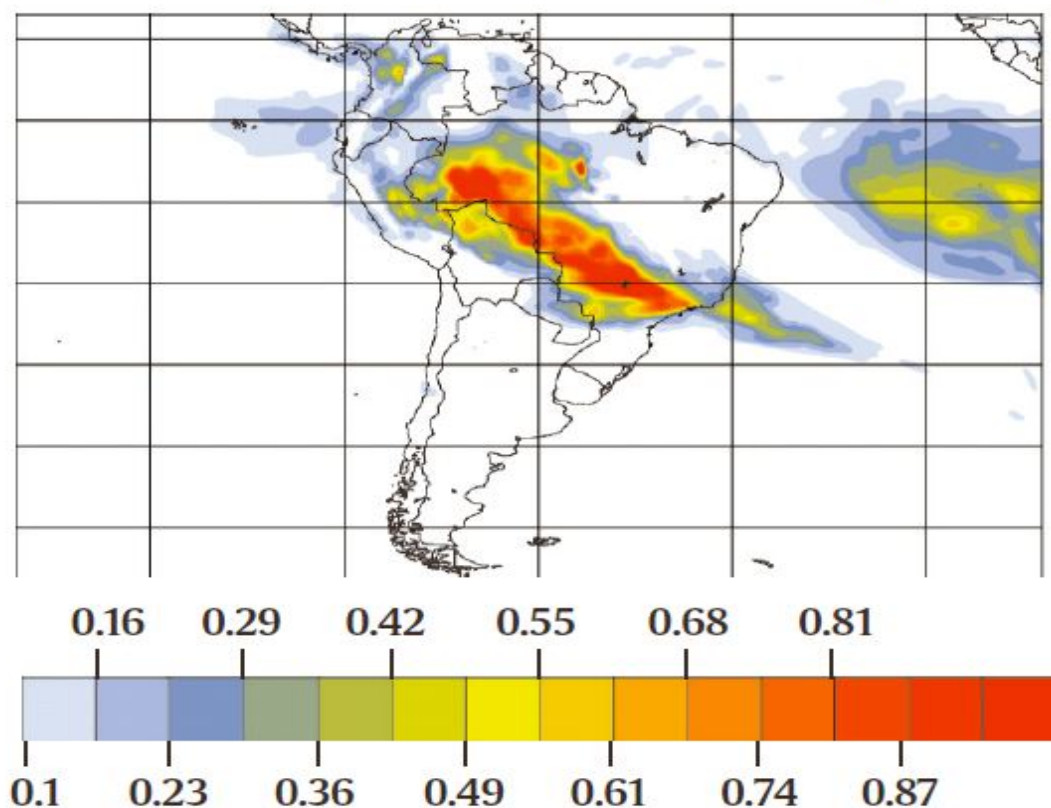
1. Under Brazil's **Forest Code of 1965**, farmers could purchase Amazon land but could farm only 20% of it. Following the collapse of the

military dictatorship in 1988, a new constitution gave **indigenous populations legal ownership of their land and the right to reject development of their land**. In 2012, the **Forest Code was revised to reduce the area of deforested land required to be restored**, and to reduce penalties for illegal deforesting. In 2018, Brazil's Supreme Court upheld these changes.

2. The new regime, which came to power in January 2019, had promised during election campaign that it would **open up the Amazon region for business**.
3. The Amazon has large reserves of gold and other minerals. Along with aggressive policies of promoting agribusiness, the government has **opposed protections for indigenous tribal land**.
4. Conservationists believe that for Brazil's government, **short-term economic interests pushed by lobbies take precedence over environmental concerns**.

AEROSOL OPTICAL DEPTH VALUES

(A measure of the extinction of the solar beam by dust and haze; the lower the value, the cleaner the atmosphere)



Sources: the Hindu.

Facts for Prelims and mains:

CITES CoP 2019: Otters given highest protection from trade:

Context: Asian small-clawed as well as smooth-coated otters have been included in Appendix I of CITES.

IUCN status: Both species are classified on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, or IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species, as facing a 'high risk of extinction in the wild' and are listed as '**vulnerable**'.

The proposal to list the otters was floated by Bangladesh, India, Nepal and the Philippines. They were both accepted by vote with more than the required two-thirds majority.

The CITES Appendices:

1. **Appendix I** includes species threatened with extinction. Trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances.
2. **Appendix II** lists species that are not necessarily now threatened with extinction but that may become so unless trade is closely controlled. It also includes so-called "look-alike species", i.e. species whose specimens in trade look like those of species listed for conservation reasons. International trade in specimens of Appendix-II species may be authorized by the granting of an export permit or re-export certificate.
3. **Appendix III** is a list of species included at the request of a Party that already regulates trade in the species and that needs the cooperation of other countries to prevent unsustainable or illegal

exploitation International trade in specimens of species listed in this Appendix is allowed only on presentation of the appropriate permits or certificates.

Mars solar conjunction:

Context: Mars Solar conjunction for **NASA's Curiosity rover and InSight lander** will happen between August 28 and September 7.

What is it?

1. During Mars solar conjunction, **Mars and Earth will be on opposite sides of the Sun.**
2. The Sun expels hot, ionised gas from its corona, which extends far into space.
3. During solar conjunction, this gas can interfere with radio signals when engineers try to communicate with spacecraft at Mars, corrupting commands and resulting in unexpected behaviour from those space explorers.
4. When Mars disappears far enough behind the Sun's corona that there is increased risk of radio interference, engineers hold off on sending commands.
5. **Solar conjunction occurs every two years.**

Community Radio Sammelan:

- The **Seventh Community Radio Sammelan** will be held in New Delhi.
- The Sammelan, being **organized by Ministry of Information & Broadcasting**, will witness participation of all operational Community Radio Stations across the country.
- **The theme of this year's Sammelan** is 'Community Radio for SDGs'.
- The representatives of the Community Radio Stations will discuss experiences and possibilities of programming for better public awareness on the Sustainable Development Goals.

